

Support for the Commission on Children from the Literacy Coalition

I'm speaking for a statewide coalition of parents, teachers, professionals and advocates concerned about children with reading disabilities.

- Connecticut Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities, www.cacld.org
- Connecticut Branch, International Dyslexia Association, www.connbida.org
- Learning Disabilities Association of Connecticut, www.ldact.org
- NorwalkSEEKS, www.norwalkseeks.org
- Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities, www.SmartKidswithLD.org

Connecticut has the best legislation in the country for science based reading instruction - that is, reading instruction that works. We have this wonderful record because almost a decade ago, the Children's Commission brought together the best reading researchers in the country and presented their evidence to this legislature. Children are the one constituency who have no voice or vote of their own, and children who can't read desperately need the improvements in reading instruction that are beginning to come about as a result of the Children's Commission efforts.

However, there's still a long way to go before those reading scores come up out of the cellar, and we still need the Children's Commission to work with us to make additional improvements. Right now, the focus is on effective reading instruction at the college of education level, as we pointed out in the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) study, *What Education Schools Aren't Teaching About Reading And What Elementary Teachers Aren't Learning*, that we gave you last week. The Commission is also working to improve literacy training in early childcare settings, that all-important time when children's brains are developing and they need rich language, conversation and exposure to print.

Improvement in reading scores will require fundamental changes to reading instruction in school systems across the state. For those changes to come about, we need the Children's Commission to continue providing the information, coordination and resources that they have so ably provided in the past.

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**The Imperative for Connecticut's Reading Crisis:
What We Know and What We Need**

Many children and adults can't read and struggle when they try. Illiteracy can limit their personal and professional opportunities for success. It may also lead to tragic results. This widespread problem must be recognized and addressed.

We know that:

- students at risk for reading failure can be helped as early as preschool and kindergarten.
- early intervention can enable many children to become skilled readers and be ready to learn.
- both teaching children to read and learning to read can be extremely difficult.
- teachers want to help their students succeed but many don't know how.
- most teachers have not been taught how to teach reading effectively.
- research indicates the best way to teach reading emphasizes both phonics and meaning.
- new elementary grade teachers in CT must pass a test to show they can apply these methods.

We need to:

- **teach all children to read in first grade.**
Those who don't, have only a one in eight chance of catching up.
- **help children to read well by the end of third grade.**
This is critical, yet only 4 out of 10 fourth graders scored at grade level in CT.
- **close the reading gap between disadvantaged students and their peers.**
CT's fourth grade achievement gap is one of the largest nationwide.
- **keep students in school.**
Kids who can't read well are more likely to drop out, be limited to low paying jobs and never reach their full potential.
- **teach illiterate adults to read.**
Empower them to succeed.
- **reduce the prison population.**
Illiteracy is common among both inmates and the unemployed.
- **save tax dollars.**
The 2005-06 average cost per inmate in CT was about \$30,500 a year. The average cost to educate a child in CT that year was less than half as much.

For more information, visit the following websites or call of one of these co-sponsoring organizations:

- The Connecticut Branch of the International Dyslexia Association
www.connbida.org 203-865-6163, x 257
- Connecticut Association for Adults and Children with Learning Disabilities
www.caclld.org 203-838-5010
- Norwalk Seeks www.norwalkseeks.org
- Learning Disabilities Association of Connecticut www.ldact.org 860-560-1711
- Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities www.SmartKidswithLD.org

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